

Guidelines for Quarantine After Exposure in K-12 Classroom Settings

While great strides have been made in controlling the spread of COVID-19, the virus remains a threat, and the ongoing health and safety of K-12 students, staff, and volunteers remains paramount. **Ohio's goal is to keep K-12 students in school, in person five days a week. Students benefit cognitively, emotionally, and developmentally from in-person learning.**

This guidance can help guide quarantine decisions after a student or adult contact is exposed to someone with COVID-19 **in the classroom setting.**

As Ohio prepares to enter the 2021-22 academic year, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) recommends in its [COVID-19 Health and Prevention Guidance for Ohio K-12 Schools](#) following layered prevention strategies that were remarkably effective at controlling COVID-19 during the 2020-21 school year. These include strongly recommending vaccination for those who are eligible; strongly recommending use of face masks in K-12 settings, particularly for those who are not fully vaccinated; maximizing distance between people; prompt identification and providing appropriate care for people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19; practicing good hygiene; and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection.

Modified quarantine procedures for K-12 schools

The K-12 school environment is a setting in which layered public health strategies have been shown to be effective at reducing spread of COVID-19. During the 2020-21 school year, Ohio modified standard quarantine procedures for K-12 students based upon studies and pilot evaluations, including the [Ohio Schools COVID-19 Evaluation](#), which is further supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) new Close Contact K-12 Exception. Modified quarantine procedures will continue as Ohio schools begin the 2021-22 school year. With layered prevention strategies in place, more students will be able to remain in the classroom and continue participating in sports and extra-curricular activities.

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness; while some infections are expected to occur in fully vaccinated people, these breakthrough infections are typically mild. To help prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 and keep students in school, everyone should follow recommended prevention measures after possible exposure to COVID-19.

The below guidance can be used to address **COVID-19 exposures in K-12 in-person learning environments** and on required school transportation (e.g., school buses). Consult with your local health department if you have questions or concerns about quarantine procedures.

Please note that this guidance applies for **contacts** who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. The person who tested positive for COVID-19 should follow standard isolation procedures.

- **Quarantine is not necessary** for students and adults possibly exposed to COVID-19 in K-12 school settings, regardless of vaccination status, if ALL the following prevention measures have been in place:
 - **Masking** for students and staff (regardless of vaccination status).
 - **Physical distancing** is maximized (at least 3 feet between desks).
 - Documented **COVID-19 prevention policies** (e.g., identification of individuals experiencing symptoms, strategies to increase ventilation, protocols for cleaning, etc.).

- If not all prevention measures listed above were in place, **quarantine is not necessary** for fully vaccinated* students and adults provided they adhere to the following precautions: Wear a mask indoors, as much as possible, either for 14 days or until a viral (PCR or antigen) test performed three to five days after exposure has come back as negative. In addition:
 - Self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days following exposure; unless symptoms develop, individuals can continue attending in-person class and participating in sports and extra-curricular activities.
 - Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate away from others and be evaluated for COVID-19. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) may be recommended in coordination with the local health department, school, healthcare provider, or parents/guardians.
 - If they test positive, they should isolate for at least 10 days from the date symptoms started (or the date of the positive test if they have no symptoms).
 - *Note: A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the second dose of a two-dose vaccine (Moderna or Pfizer vaccine) or two weeks after receiving a single-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson vaccine).
- If not all prevention measures listed above were in place, **quarantine is not necessary** for students and adults who are not fully vaccinated if the **person who was exposed** was wearing a **face mask** consistently and correctly and physical distancing was maintained. However, they should take the following precautions:
 - Wear a mask indoors, as much as possible, either for 14 days or until a viral (PCR or antigen) test performed at least five days after exposure has come back as negative. While this negative result would allow them to discontinue masking in school after day seven, we encourage them to continue masking.
 - Self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days following exposure; unless symptoms develop, individuals can continue attending in-person class and participating in sports and extra-curricular activities.
 - Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate away from others and be evaluated for COVID-19. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) may be recommended in coordination with the local health department, school, healthcare provider, or parents/guardians.
 - If they test positive, they should isolate for at least 10 days from the date symptoms started (or the date of the positive test if they have no symptoms).

Quarantine should be required if the student or teacher is not fully vaccinated, and layers of prevention were not in place as described above.

- **If quarantine is necessary because layers of prevention were not in place as described above**, it should last for at least seven days since the last exposure, and the contact should have a negative viral (PCR or antigen) test collected on or after day five. Individuals should watch for any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days.
 - During quarantine, contacts should be advised to stay home and away from others as much as possible.
 - If they become symptomatic at any point, they should receive clinical evaluation or testing for COVID-19.
- **The above guidelines for students and adults only apply to exposures occurring in classroom settings.** Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and exposed to COVID-19 outside of the school setting should refrain from attending in-person school and participating in organized sports or extracurriculars throughout their quarantine period.

Updated Aug. 5, 2021.

For additional information, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov.

For answers to your COVID-19 questions, call 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634).

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. If you or a loved one are experiencing anxiety related to the coronavirus pandemic, help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call the COVID-19 CareLine at 1-800-720-9616.

For more information, visit: coronavirus.ohio.gov

Quarantine and isolation remain the cornerstone of public health work. For decades public health has used quarantine and isolation as a tool to control the spread of communicable diseases. The local health departments continue to have the authority and responsibility to issue quarantine and/or isolation orders when appropriate and necessary. **Local health departments are encouraged to consult with their local legal counsel regarding this information and specific scenarios.**

Health Department Authority for Quarantine, Ohio Revised Code

R.C. 3707.08 says:

When a person known to have been exposed to a communicable disease declared quarantinable by the board of health of a city or general health district or the department of health is reported within its jurisdiction, the board shall at once restrict such person to his place of residence or other suitable place, prohibit entrance to or exit from such place without the board's written permission in such manner as to prevent effective contact with individuals not so exposed, and enforce such restrictive measures as are prescribed by the department.

When a person has, or is suspected of having, a communicable disease for which isolation is required by the board or the department, the board shall at once cause such person to be separated from susceptible persons in such places and under such circumstances as will prevent the conveyance of the infectious agents to susceptible persons, prohibit entrance to or exit from such places without the board's written permission, and enforce such restrictive measures as are prescribed by the department.

No person isolated or quarantined by a board shall leave the premises to which he has been restricted without the written permission of such board until released from isolation or quarantine by it in accordance with the rules and regulations of the department.

R.C. 3707.11, which became effective on June 23, 2021, affirms the local health department's authority to issue an order of quarantine or isolation.

A board of health of a city or general health district, or the authority having the duties of a board of health under section 3709.05 of the Revised Code, may only issue a quarantine or isolation order under this chapter that applies to individuals who have been medically diagnosed with the disease that is the subject of the order or individuals who have come in direct contact¹ with someone who has been medically diagnosed² with the disease that is the subject of the order.

R.C. 3707.16 makes clear that quarantine persons are not permitted to attend public gatherings, with a specific mention of schools.

No person isolated or quarantined for a communicable disease declared by the board of health of a city or general health district or the department of health to require isolation or quarantine shall attend any public, private, or parochial school or college, Sunday school, church, or any other public gathering, until released from isolation or quarantine by the board. All school principals, Sunday school superintendents, or other persons in charge of such schools or other gatherings shall exclude any such person until he presents a written permit of the board to attend.

R.C. 3707.34 provides a procedure for a board of health to give the authority to its health commissioner to issue quarantine and isolation orders when convening a full board meeting would be impracticable or doing so would compromise the public health.

(A) The health commissioner appointed by a board of health of a general or city health district may act on behalf of the board in administering the provision of sections 3707.04 to 3707.32 of the Revised Code regarding quarantine and isolation if the commissioner acts pursuant to a policy the board adopts as described in division (B) of this section and either of the following applies:

(1) Circumstances render a meeting of the board impractical or impossible.

(2) Delaying action until a meeting of the board compromises the public health.

(B) Each board of health shall adopt a policy, subject to the approval of the district advisory council or city council for city health districts not governed by an advisory council, specifying the actions that a health commissioner may take pursuant to this section. Any action a health commissioner takes in accordance with the board's policy is deemed an action taken by the board unless the board votes to nullify the commissioner's action.

¹Direct contact is discussed and addressed in the accompanying guidance.

²Medical diagnosis means the process of identifying a condition or disease by its signs and symptoms. Medical diagnoses are made by licensed professionals operating within their scope of practice or from a positive test authorized for use by the Food and Drug Administration.